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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the presence of and interaction between educational and cultural/linguistic characteristics in 95 Hispanic limited-English-proficient elementary school students previously enrolled in bilingual and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs. Of this group, 51 had never been referred to special education and 44 had been referenced. The two groups of students were compared on 15 acculturation and education variables, including: school; sex; age; grade; years in a bilingual or ESL program; LAU category; English language proficiency; minority enrollment; years in the United States; acculturation; verbal intelligence quotient (IQ); nonverbal IQ; full scale IQ; reason for referral or problem behavior; and educational achievement. The results indicate that acculturation characteristics were significantly related to the referral and placement of these students in special education, and were also highly correlated to school achievement. The statistical results, the acculturation scale used, a summary of findings, and a 12-item bibliography are appended. (Author/MSE)

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COMPARISON OF ACCULTURATION AND EDUCATION CHARACTERISTICS OF REFERRED AND NONREFERRED CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIFFERENT CHILDREN

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This study investigated the acculturation and education characteristics of culturally/linguistically different elementary school children who had been enrolled in bilingual programs. The purpose of the study was to identify those education and acculturation characteristics which distinguished children who had been referred to special education from nonreferred children. The effect of the interaction of these characteristics upon predicting referral and placement was also examined. The sample consisted of 95 Hispanic children who had been enrolled in bilingual education programs. Comparative profiles and a scale to rate the degree of acculturation were developed. The findings indicated that acculturation characteristics were significantly involved in the referral and placement of the target students in special education, as well as highly correlated to school achievement.

One of the most controversial issues currently facing educators in public school districts throughout the United States is the identification and referral of culturally and linguistically different children for placement in special education programs. Over the past decade, disproportionate referral of minority children (both over and under referral and placement) has become a matter of increasing concern to educators in public schools. Personnel involved in the referral and placement of these children, into special assistance programs, need to be able to identify the potential exceptional educational characteristics and the cultural and linguistic characteristics of these children in order to make informed and appropriate decisions. The interactive effects of these characteristics upon the child experiencing cultural and/or linguistic adaptation, i.e., acculturation, must be taken into account in the referral/placement decision. Without this knowledge, education personnel cannot make appropriate identification, referral, and service decisions for the culturally and linguistically different (CLD) child.

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It is evident from a review of previous research that the interrelationship of cultural and educational characteristics is central to answering questions about appropriate identification, referral and instruction of CLD exceptional children. It is also evident from a review of these studies

that the results of acculturation research have not been considered in this interrelationship.

There is ample evidence that cultural, linguistic, and psychological changes occur among populations undergoing acculturation (Berry, 1970; Witkin & Berry, 1975). This is especially troubling since the effects of acculturation are similar to and may be confused with some of the behaviors for which children are referred to special education. Knowledge about these characteristics and needs of the CLD population is incomplete without a knowledge of the effects of acculturation upon this population and how these acculturational factors relate to exceptionality.

Children in need of special assistance will continue to be identified and placed in special education classrooms. It is important to identify their special needs, delineating those characteristics of exceptionality from those characteristics of acculturation, and to provide them appropriate services.

This study examined the presence of and the interaction between educational and cultural/linguistic characteristics of CLD children experiencing acculturation in the public school system. It also examined and identified which of these characteristics differentiated children referred for special education placement from nonreferred culturally and linguistically different children. The results and conclusions of this study provide guidance in developing appropriate training for school personnel in the identification, referral and instruction of the culturally and linguistically different exceptional population in the public schools.

Definition of Terms

Acculturation: A type of cultural change initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultures. The dynamics of acculturation include selective adaptation of the value system, integration and differentiation processes. Acculturation does not mean assimilation. It refers to the process by which members of one culture adapt to the presence of another culture. This adaptation may be through integration, assimilation, rejection, or deculturation (Padilla, 1980).

Convergence: The interaction of an exceptional condition(s) and the cultural and linguistic characteristics of an individual. The effect of being retarded upon the acculturation of a Spanish speaking child is an example of convergence. Another example is the differing attitude within particular

cultural groups toward an exceptional condition and the effect of this upon a CLD exceptional child's development and learning.

Culturally and linguistically different: An individual whose native culture is not of mainstream America and whose native language is not English. The individual may or may not be acculturated to some extent and may or may not be relatively proficient in English or in his/her native language.

Exceptional: A condition which requires modification of the regular instructional program in order for a child to achieve his/her maximum potential (Haring and McCormick, 1986).

Special education: Instruction designed for children whose educational needs cannot be addressed effectively in the regular school program without adaptation or modification (Haring and McCormick, 1986).

Methodology

The sample for this study consisted of 95 Hispanic limited English proficient (LEP) elementary students who were identified by a local school district and enrolled in bilingual/ESL programs in the district prior to the 1984-85 school year. The school district was asked to provide information on students, randomly selected, from their K-6 bilingual/ESL programs. The sample consisted of 95 bilingual children, 51 of whom had never been referred to special education and 44 of whom had been referred to special education. The referred students included 27 referred but not placed and 17 referred and placed in special education within the last two years. All of these students were identified by the district as limited English proficient to some extent and of Hispanic cultural backgrounds.

The students were compared on 15 acculturation and education variables selected on the basis of an extensive review of the literature. The acculturation variables were selected from research focused on the effect of numerous cultural and linguistic factors upon the successful acculturation of CLD students in this country (Alder, 1975; Juffer, 1983; Padilla, 1980). The education variables were those regularly considered in the referral and placement of any child in special education (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1981; Knoff, 1983; Smith, 1982) included in Table I.

Composite scores for the two major variable categories, acculturation

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and educational achievement, were also considered. A scale for rating relative degree of acculturation was developed based upon the variables and research cited above. A copy of the scale is given in Appendix A. This scale was submitted to 15 professionals for review and modification.

The theoretical foundation of this study is based upon a holistic view of identifying and providing for the special needs of children. More specifically, the needs of the whole child must be identified and provided for in an integrated curriculum before it can be said that his/her needs have been met. The children in the bilingual special education population are children who may have special linguistic, cultural and educational characteristics which may distinguish them from 'regular' bilingual children and which may assist in identifying their special learning needs.

In examining cultural and linguistic characteristics, the additional factor of acculturation must be considered. Acculturation is a process which affects any person exposed to a different cultural and social environment. Of the four general acculturation outcomes (i.e., integration, assimilation, rejection, and marginality) integration was selected as the adaptive goal against which the children were rated. The acculturation scale developed (Appendix A) was based upon research into how successful cultural integration takes place in a population experiencing acculturation (Padilla, 1980).

Both acculturation and education variables have been featured in previous studies of identification and referral of CLD children. However, the interaction of these characteristics have rarely been examined. This interaction was the central concern in this study.

A review of the literature led to the expectation that within a randomly selected group of school children, those referred and/or placed in special education would differ significantly from those not referred or placed, particularly in regard to achievement and ability. In previous studies, cultural and linguistic differences between mainstream and minority became an additional factor in whether or not a child was referred and/or placed. In this study, however, all of the children were from the same cultural and linguistic background. As they were also from the same nontransient socioeconomic background and age range, it was expected that the children should be relatively homogeneous in regard to cultural and linguistic variables, with some differences between individual children. In theory, pre-investigation expectations assumed that referred and nonreferred children would differ on their education profile but not on their acculturation (cultural and linguistic) profile.

The study examined the following main research question:

> In what acculturational and educational ways do nonreferred culturally and linguistically different children differ from those referred to special education?

Nonreferred CLD children (N) were compared to referred CLD (R) as a whole group. The N group was also compared separately to referred but not placed (R*) CLD children and to placed (P) CLD children. A summary of the findings by N/R/R*/P groups is given in TABLE II and appendixes.

Findings

Contrary to theoretical expectations, the referred and nonreferred groups did not differ at a statistically significant level on their education profiles but difference did appear on their acculturation profiles. Findings also indicated a strong interaction and correlation between particular acculturation and education variables. Although academic concerns were cited as the primary reason for referral, there was no statistically significant difference in achievement test scores in any content area. There was a meaningful effect size between nonreferred and placed children. A significant interaction was found between minority enrollment and educational achievement. This is shown in Figure I and Appendixes.

Differences were found between R* and P subjects on selected acculturation variables: LAU category, language proficiency, minority enrollment, and acculturation. There were no significant differences for any education variable between these two groups.

Differences were found between N and P subjects on selected acculturation variables: LAU category, language proficiency, minority enrollment, and acculturation. There were no significant differences between N and P groups on educational variable.

No significant differences were found between N and R* subjects on selected acculturation education variables.

A significant interaction was found between minority enrollment and educational achievement. Nonreferred subjects had higher educational achievement in schools with high minority enrollment while placed subjects

had higher educational achievement in schools with low minority enrollment.

A significant relationship also was found between years in bilingual programs and educational achievement. Nonreferred subjects with more years of bilingual instruction had better educational achievement than nonreferred subjects with fewer years of bilingual/ESL instruction. This relationship between high educational achievement and years of bilingual instruction was significant for the entire sample population. This was also found to be true for language proficiency. A significant relationship was found between language proficiency and educational achievement for all referral status groups.

A significant relationship was found between years in the United States and educational achievement. Referred but not placed subjects who had been in the United States more than four years, were significantly higher in educational achievement than those who had been in the United States less than four years. The relationship between more years in the United States and level of educational achievement was statistically significant for the population as a whole. A significant relationship also was found between level of acculturation and educational achievement for all referral status groups. The population as a whole performed better on educational achievement the higher the level of acculturation.

It may be concluded that culturally and linguistically different children continue to be disproportionately referred and placed in special education. In addition, it can be stated, that the psychodynamics of acculturation are clearly factors in referral and placement and must be considered in the identification and instruction of culturally and linguistically different children with special needs.

Conclusions

The literature indicated that disproportionate referral to special education of culturally and linguistically different children decreased when minority enrollment increased and bilingual education programs were available (Finn, 1982). This study supported this finding. It also suggests that bilingual education appears to improve the educational achievement of culturally and linguistically different children. The finding that nonreferred culturally and linguistically different children apparently did better educationally in schools with high minority enrollment may be due to differences in the quality of the available alternative programs including

bilingual instruction. It may also be related to the presence of role models, improved self concept, etc. There is also the possibility that CLD children are over-referred in schools with low minority enrollment while under-referred in schools with high minority enrollment. Expectations may be lower in high minority schools or teachers may be less willing to risk censure for referring minority children with learning and behavior problems.

Some of the literature indicated that differences in education variables were to be expected between children referred to special education and those not referred to special education (Haring and McCormick, 1986). Prior research indicated that differences in educational achievement and overall ability may not be as significant in referral as other education variables, such as reason for referral (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1981). The results of this study indicate that CLD children referred to special education do not appear to differ significantly from those not referred in achievement and ability but do differ in degree of teacher concern. Although they did not differ significantly on their educational profile, all children were referred for 'academic' reasons rather than 'behavior' or other reasons. The implications are that regular classroom teachers need improved training in the identification of learning problems among and appropriate instruction for the culturally and linguistically different. The availability of alternative programs and intervention alternatives for concerned teachers may be indicated. As a result of this study, such an intervention process was developed and has been implemented for over 3 years (Collier, 1984).

The literature indicated that there should be only slight individual differences in acculturation variables within a population of the same age, socioeconomic status and ethnic background (Padilla, 1980). However, the results of this study indicate that CLD children referred to special education differ significantly in acculturation characteristics from those not referred. Placed students appeared to be more highly acculturated, more bilingual, and more English proficient than either nonreferred or referred/not placed students. Referred but not placed students appeared to be the least acculturated, least proficient in English, and had the lowest achievement scores. Taken in conjunction with the minority enrollment findings, it may be that in low minority enrollment schools culturally and linguistically different children are referred more frequently, but only the most acculturated and English proficient of these CLD children are actually placed. One potential explanation for this is that the staffing teams may be sensitive to the difficulties inherent in assessing possible exceptionality in a less acculturated limited English proficient student and may defer full staffing and/or placement until the student is more acculturated and more proficient.

However, there are few bilingual services available in the low minority enrollment schools, and access to these is clearly correlated to achievement. Therefore, it becomes a foregone conclusion that these children's special learning needs will not be met and they will be re-referred until they "qualify" for special education. At this time their initial learning problems may have been compounded with other learning and behavior problems. In minority enrollment schools, bilingual or ESL instruction may be used as an intervention for "at risk" children referred, but not placed in special education.

In conclusion, acculturation characteristics were found to be significantly involved in the referral and placement of culturally and linguistically different children to special education, as well as highly correlated to the school achievement of these students.

TABLE I

Means and Standard Deviations: Referral Status-Acculturation and Education Variables

Means and Standard Deviations by Referral Status for Each Education Variable

Education Variable	$\bar{x}_N$	sd_N	$\bar{x}_R$	sd_R	$\bar{x}_{R^*}$	sd_{R^*}	$\bar{x}_P$	sd_P
ABV	-	-	83.59	9.05	86.25	9.26	82.77	8.18
ABN	-	-	94.77	11.09	92.5	6.61	93.16	12.29
ABT	-	-	86.65	8.29	88.25	6.70	86.35	8.78
INV	1.12	.38	3.07	.69	2.89	.75	3.35	.79
EDT	14.13	4.39	11.76	4.0	12.05	4.83	11.41	2.85
	N = 51		N = 44		N = 27		N = 17	

Note:

ABV = Verbal I.Q.; ABN = Nonverbal I.Q., ABT = Full scale I.Q. (I.Q. tests are not administered to nonreferred); INV = Degree of Concern; EDT = Educational Achievement Score; N = Nonreferred; R = Referred; R* = Referred/Not Placed; P = Referred/Placed.

TABLE I

Means and Standard Deviations: Referral Status-Acculturation and Education Variables

Means and Standard Deviations by Referral Status for Each Acculturation and Education Variable

Acculturation Variables	$\bar{X}_N$	sd_N	$\bar{X}_R$	sd_R	$\bar{X}_{R^*}$	sd_{R^*}	$\bar{X}_P$	sd_P
BI	1.32	.65	1.39	.49	1.52	.51	1.18	.39
LAU **	1.75	.89	1.98	1.13	1.30	.29	3.06	1.13
LPE **	2.45	1.42	2.43	1.34	1.82	1.15	3.41	1.01
CL ***	49.2	11.99	36.68	13.86	39.64	12.04	31.97	15.55
US	3.3	2.20	3.84	1.87	3.67	1.57	4.12	2.29
ACT **	13.78	3.38	14.16	3.02	12.85	2.53	16.24	2.58
	N = 51		N = 44		N = 27		N = 17	

Note: BI = Years in Bilingual/ESL; LAU = LAU/ELPA Category; LPE = English Language Proficiency; CL = Percent minority enrollment; US = Years in United States; ACT = Acculturation; N = Nonreferred; R = Referred; R* = Referred/Not Placed; P = Referred/Placed.

** $P < .05$

*** $P < .01$

APPENDIX A

CCDES ACCULTURATION SCALE

NAME _____ SCHOOL _____

DATE OF BIRTH _____ SEX _____ GRADE _____

LANGUAGE(s) SPOKEN AT HOME _____

	Raw Data	CCDESA Scale Score
Number of years, United States		
Number of years, School District		
Number of years, ESL and/or bilingual education		
LAU category		
Native language proficiency		
English language proficiency		
Ethnicity/Nation of origin		
Percentage minority enrollment in attending school		
CCDESA Scale Score TOTAL		

CCDESA SCALE SCORE GUILDELINES

Number of years, US/SD:	Number of years, ESL/BE:
Under 2 • 1	0.0 - 1.0 • 1
2-3 • 2	1.1 - 1.5 • 2
4-5 • 3	1.6 - 2.0 • 3
6-7 • 4	2.1 - 2.5 • 4
8-9 • 5	2.6 - 3.0 • 5

LAU category	Ethnicity
A • 1	Native American • 1
B • 2	Hispanic • 2
C • 3	Asian/Pac. Is. • 3
D • 4	Black/MidEast • 4
E • 5	White/European • 5

Percentage Enrollment	Language Proficiency
81% - 100% • 1	Least • 1
61% - 80% • 2	Proficient • 2
41% - 60% • 3	• 3
21% - 40% • 4	Most • 4
0% - 20% • 5	Proficient • 5

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CCDESA Scale based upon research by Adler, 1975; Berry, 1980; Collier, 1983; and Jaffer, 1983.

TABLE II: Summary of Findings

Variable	Result
1. School	1. Significant for N/R Significant for N/R*/P
2. Sex	2. No Significance
3. Age	3. No significance for N/R Significant of N/R*/P
4. Grade	4. No significance for N/R Significant for N/R*/P
5. Years in Bilingual/ESL Program	5. No Significance
6. LAU/ELPA Category	6. No significance for N/R Significant for N/R*/P
7. English Language Proficiency	7. No significance for N/R Significant for N/R*/P
8. Minority Enrollment	8. Significant for N/R Significant for N/R*/P
9. Years in United States	9. No signifance
10. Acculturation	10. No significance for N/R Significant for N/R*/P
11. Verbal I.Q.	11. No significance for R/R*/P
12. Nonverbal I.Q.	12. No significance for R/R*/P
13. Full scale I.Q.	13. No significance for R/R*/P
14. Reason for referral or problem behavior	14. No significance
15. Educational achievement	15. Significant for N/R No significance for N/R*/P

However: ES
N/P .75
N/R* .45
N/R .56
P/R* .16

Summary of results comparing referral status for each dependent variable.

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